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A Comparison of How Schools Diagnose and Support Growth in Reading for Third Grade Students

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To Dale, Mandy, and Brad

You know why...

A Comparison of How Schools Diagnose and Support Growth in Reading for Third Graders

by

Rachel B. Gnage

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was three fold. First examined was how reading abilities are identified in typical third grade classrooms. Secondly, approaches, strategies, and instruments classroom teachers, remedial reading specialist, and special education teachers (reading facilitators) use to support growth was investigated. Finally, school districts were compared with each other. Forty-six third grade reading facilitators were surveyed with a researcher-made instrument that included eighty-five items and four open-ended questions. Data was gathered in frequency tables from the twenty-six surveys that were returned. The survey data displayed that reading facilitators use a wide variety of elements to diagnose reading abilities and support growth in their student's reading throughout the school year. Most commonly they use informal test and observations when first evaluating student ability. Later they gather information by using informal observations, criterion referenced test, and running records among other diagnostic tools. These reading facilitators also use diverse approaches, techniques, and strategies when supporting growth of their students.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out how reading abilities are identified in typical third grade classrooms. A second purpose was to ascertain the approaches, strategies, and instruments reading facilitators (classroom teachers and specialists) use to support growth. A comparison was made among school districts.

Questions

- What do classroom teachers, reading specialists, and inclusion special education teachers (reading facilitators) typically use for diagnosing reading abilities of third grade children?
- What do these reading facilitators typically use to support growth in the reading abilities of third grade children?
- How do reading facilitators and their school districts compare to each other in their methods for identification and support of growth?

Need for the Study

Elementary classroom teachers are called on to fill many roles. Among the various roles are reading diagnostician and reading remediation specialist. Diagnosing reading abilities and supporting growth in reading have been said to be crucial for future successes. Researchers (Bricklin, 1991, Forness and Kavale, 1983, Manalo, 1992, Margolis and Denny, 1994) have examined numerous aspects of how reading diagnosis and support is accomplished. They have scrutinized the way classroom teachers and remedial reading specialists diagnose and act in response to problematic situations in the reading classroom, (Hughes and Wedman, 1992, Menges and Rando, 1989) Additionally, how teachers form positions about what they teach and how they teach it have been studied. (Blaunstein, 1995, Hughes and Wedman, 1992, Maxon, 1996, and Menges and Rando, 1989). However, little information has been gathered to enumerate common diagnostic tools and common ways reading growth is supported.

Currently there is little research that brings together the approaches, strategies, and instruments teachers and reading specialists choose to use for this diagnosis and action. This study sought to assist in filling that knowledge gap.

Limitations of the Study

The relatively small number of different school districts (n = 5), and participants, (n=26), may not have been representative of the generalized population of school districts or of third grade teachers.

- The length of the survey may have precluded answers to the open-ended questions. If this occurred then the information gathered may not have been complete and accurate.
- The time frame of the distribution of the survey may have affected the number of surveys returned. One district employed a 13 week trimester system. Report cards came due during the deployment of the surveys. All other districts were half way into their third quarter marking period.

Summary

Supporting the growth of children in reading and the amelioration of difficulties in this area is of great importance in classrooms in America today. Elementary classroom teachers and other reading specialists who work with children spend a reasonable amount of time in evaluation and remediation of

a variety of reading difficulties. A consolidated grouping of the approaches, strategies, and instruments reading facilitators customarily use has not been examined. This study strove to shed light on that gap. It also attempted to identify prevailing techniques used to bolster success, and to discover commonalties between different school districts.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out how reading abilities are identified in typical third grade classrooms. A second purpose was to ascertain the approaches; strategies, and instruments reading facilitators (classroom teachers and specialists) use to support growth. A comparison was made among school districts.

Overview

Elementary classroom teachers are called on to fill many roles. One of these roles is reading diagnostician. This duty has many facets. Blair and Rupley (1990) theorize that "diagnosis is the heart of effective reading instruction" p. 34. This philosophy places utmost importance on reading diagnosis. Bricklin (1991) presents the crucial role a student's concept of him/herself as a learner is to the diagnosing and the treating of children with reading disabilities. Manalo (1992) developed a case study that considered problems in diagnosing a child. The subject had been diagnosed with the Gates-McGinitie and the Gates-McKillop

screening tests, and was found to be a poor reader, and possibly a developmental dyslexic. Her IQ, as determined by the WISC-R, was 106. The subject of the case study had been included in the experimental group of a study that focused on the differences in performance of developmental dyslexics and normal readers of the same age on various tasks. Manalo focused his study on this subject because on most of the reading related tasks administered to both experimental and control groups in the study mentioned above, she performed better than the other experimental subjects, and often performed as well, if not better than her control counterparts. The subject could read quickly and easily, blend, associate graphemes-phonemes, and read nonwords. Due to these factors, Manalo found she had no impairment in what he calls the direct or analytic reading routes. There were no known extrinsic deficits to impair her reading performance. Manalo posits that her carelessness and inaccuracy in word anticipation could be due to insufficient metacognitive control processes. The ability to adapt to different text types may have been what the subject was lacking There is no existing model that specifically outlines the stages of acquisition of word anticipation skills in normal reading development or metacognitive knowledge development so it is not possible to determine whether the subject was normal or lagging behind her peers. Forness and Kavale (1983) in their review of the research further discussed the problems they had with the identification and classification of reading disabilities for remedial purposes. "The syndrome of specific reading disability may include children with many different types of

disorders, each of which may call for specific remedial approaches." (p.153), They found a large amount of conflicting evidence on the nature of reading disabilities and the process of remediation . Klesius and Searls (1988) surveyed reading specialist graduate students, many of whom chose to work as elementary classroom teachers. Their survey brought to light a need for diagnostic and remedial techniques suitable for use with groups of children in the classroom setting as opposed to techniques used for individual children.

Many classroom populations are expanding to include more students with diverse abilities. Furthermore, additional teachers and specialists are joining these populations, and they are using a wide variety of approaches and strategies to diagnose and support their students reading growth. The concept of this expansion in classrooms is based in research. Forness (1982) suggests that relatively mild forms of remediation, i.e., those that can be incorporated into standard reading instruction, might relieve certain reading problems before specialized programs would need to be used. Margolis, Denny, and Hollander (1994) argue that reading specialists enhance diagnosis and instruction when they are involved as part of a team that includes the students, teachers, parents, school psychologists, and educational consultants.

Little research has been conducted in classrooms that identify the prevalent procedures and instruments teachers and specialists use to diagnose reading abilities. Limited research examines commonalties in how programs are structured to support student growth. However, there has been exploration into

teachers' beliefs and reading instruction practice (Blaunstein, 1995, Maxon, 1996); reading facilitators' diagnostic and prescriptive decisions (McHugh, 1982); and one national study that compares classroom and remedial reading teachers' perceptions and knowledge about assessment of disabled readers (International Reading Association Disabled Reader Subcommittee, 1991).

The investigation into how teachers formulate positions about what they teach and how they teach it include studies by Blaunstein, 1995, Hughes and Wedman, 1992, Maxon, 1996, and Menges and Rando, 1989.

Maxon (1996) scrutinizes the influence of teacher beliefs on literacy development. In a multiple case study design she collected data from interviews, observations, and questionnaires over an academic year. High School teachers' beliefs about instructing young at-risk students to read and write, what they say they do, what they actually do, and factors that influence their decisions were examined. She found that there is no single method of literacy instruction for at-risk children; a combination of academic approaches best serves their literacy needs.

Blaunstein (1995) reported on teacher focus groups that examined some ideas and attitudes of teachers. One purpose of this research was to discover how teachers make decisions about reading instruction for students. "As the teachers defined their roles and the decisions they make in choosing strategies and deciding if they work, all identified themselves as pragmatists who rely on empirical

evidence: Is the strategy helping their students learn?" (p.10). In this qualitative research Blaunstein (1995) found that:

> When teachers talked about how they would choose a strategy for instruction, their most important criteria were based on whether they felt they could make a strategy work in the classroom and whether they felt their students' skills would improve. Teachers choose instructional strategies on the basis of the needs of the individual child and their own teaching styles. Teachers consider two issues when they are thinking about trying a teaching strategy. First, will it work? Second, what are the challenges to making it work in my classroom? They want to know how effective a strategy will be and what, if any, are the obstacles to successfully implementing it. (p. 11)

There has also been some investigation into similarities between classroom teachers and reading specialist and their diagnostic and prescriptive decisions. McHugh (1982) developed a case study that presented data about a child experiencing reading difficulty, and a questionnaire for recording the diagnostic and prescriptive decisions about the child profiled in the case study. She then surveyed three hundred-sixty classroom teachers and specialists randomly selected from the entire job description population in public schools in Wisconsin. McHugh (1982) concluded from study results "that the reading specialists, LD teachers, Title I teachers, and classroom teachers made similar decisions about the remedial needs and instructional approaches to remediation to be used with the child profiled in the case study" (p. 547). The author notes that the one limitation of the study is the use of a forced-choice questionnaire. "The categories of responses ... may cause subjects to make judgments they would not usually

consider when evaluating a child. Also, the forced-choice format does not allow the subject to temper a response" (McHugh, 1982, p. 548).

There has been research to look at individual instruments or procedures used in classrooms. (Clariana, 1991; Simmons, 1987) However, investigations into the identification of common instruments/procedures used in classrooms today have not usually been undertaken. Examples of this phenomenon are computer-assisted instruction (CAI) and Children's storytelling. The Clariana (1991) study looked at a learner's reading ability being an important variable in the use of CAI. Children's storytelling and what it can tell us about reading difficulties was probed by Simmons (1987). She found indications that there is a strong link between reading ability and story-telling performances for some children. Simmons analysis also showed a highly individualized developing nature of story-telling performance. No studies were found that enumerated the frequency that CAI or storytelling are being used in typical classrooms.

In their study on improving instruction Menges and Rando (1989) distinguished two analysis categories: diagnosis and action. Hughes and Wedman (1992) found these categories useful in providing a framework for their study that examined how elementary teachers diagnose and act in response to problematic situations in the reading classroom. Their focus did not look at which tools teachers use for diagnosis and action.

One study that included identification of instruments/procedures used in classrooms was the 1991 International Reading Association Disabled Reader Subcommittee (IRA/DRS) survey. This study surveyed classroom teacher and remedial reading teacher members nationwide about their perceptions and knowledge of assessment of disabled readers, and a quantitative analysis was performed. The survey in this study specified twenty-three instruments and procedures for teachers to choose from, and included an area to add other instruments/procedures not specified.

The International Reading Association Disabled Reader Subcommittee found:

> When asked to specify assessment instruments/procedures they always used with students having literacy problems, most frequently mentioned by teachers across all categories was daily informal observations; also indicated by the majority of teachers in various categories were (a) writing samples; (b) standardized reading achievement tests: (c) teacher-made diagnostic tests; and (d) literature response projects. (p. 4)

The IRA/DRS states that the majority of teachers reported knowledge of the twenty-three instruments/ procedures listed on the survey form. The most frequently cited instruments/procedures that that teachers had no knowledge of were miscue inventories and process-oriented assessment. In their 1992 study Jenkins and Leicester examined how classroom teachers approach the problem of designing specialized instruction for individual students who are performing at an unsatisfactory level. They indicate that "research on how classroom teachers

plan, design, and implement remedial and specialized treatments may presage the prospects for expanding their role in educating and managing students with learning problems" (p. 556). Jenkins and Leicester (1992) were able to classify reading interventions that teachers implemented into four categories: decoding, fluency, comprehension, and attention/motivation.

In this study Jenkins and Leicester (1992) state, "The majority of classroom teachers in our study (70%) chose interventions that appeared appropriate for specific types of reading problems. .... a good portion of our sample classroom teachers seemed to take a systematic and thoughtful approach to planning specialized instruction" (p. 560). They also found that, "our classroom teachers favored instructional modifications that differed from those found in an earlier study to be used by special education resource teachers" (p. 562).

Lehman, Freeman, and Allen (1994) conducted an investigation into how teachers implement literature-based programs in their classrooms. Phase 1 was a questionnaire that provided quantitative information on teachers' perceptions and practices. Phase 2 included interviews and inventory of classroom materials of a sub-sample of the original questionnaire respondents. They state "philosophical tension is growing between teaching reading with literature (suggesting a primarily *literacy* focus): and teaching *literature* (implying a stronger *literary* perspective)"(p. 3). One interesting finding in Lehman, Freeman, and Allen (1994) was in teacher assessment. Teachers indicated in both the interviews and the questionnaire that "their priorities reflected a skills and comprehension orientation, rather than a

literary focus" (p. 16). Few mentions were made of portfolios, student self-assessment or group book discussions.

Lehman, et al. (1994) found:

> These teachers indicated that they used assessment mostly in planning for instruction or for grades, report cards, and communicating with parents. Less important was using assessment to get to know children, to watch their progress, or to provide feedback to children. In addition, although there was strong agreement on the questionnaire about the importance of teaching critical thinking when children read books, this was not supported in the interviews....(O)nly three teachers indicated in the interview that they considered critical thinking as an area they wanted to follow in terms of children's growth and progress. (p.16)

Teaching is an evolving craft. Teachers and specialists are collaborating to support their students' reading growth. Searfoss (1994) argues that:

> A revolution is underway in regular classroom reading instruction across the United States. ...One indicator of the need to reform reading diagnosis was the toll that traditional remedial instruction took on many students' self-esteem. Another powerful indicator...is the growing body of literature on the ineffectiveness of many present programs. (p.106)

Glazer and Searfoss (1988) propose that diagnosis begin and end with questions and include information gathering and evaluation based on various tools -- including tests. They assert that a wide range of variables related to the school language learning environment and fluency in oral language, writing, and reading need to be assessed. They contend that standardized, formal, and informal tests measure performance in the testing environment only.

Other dimensions must be added to the assessment milieu, "tools which enable us to diagnose .... These include observations, interviews, student self-assessment, and literacy portfolios" (Glazer and Searfoss, 1988, p.112).

It has also been suggested that IQ, language development, and reading assessment tests used in American public school systems are invalid and unreliable (Cuzbaj, 1987). Goyen (1992) argued that effective instruction of children with reading difficulties relies little on accurate diagnosis of either cause or nature of the reading problem. She stated, "Children with reading difficulties would be better served if more attention were paid to instruction and less to diagnosis" (Goyen, 1992, p. 225). In 1985 Caskey studied learning disabled children. They were given two commonly used tests, the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), and the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (Woodcock). He established that the State of Tennessee and public schools in southwest Virginia use these tests, and, "according to school psychologists attending the annual meetings of the National Association of School Psychologists, they are used in other states for the determination of academic achievement in the diagnosis of a learning disability in reading." (Caskey, 1985, p. 15). When the two tests were compared statistically Caskey found that while the correlation between the tests were significant, the obtained means were not equivalent. Caskey (1985) advises states who have approved the PIAT to be used in diagnosis of a learning disability in reading to seriously consider removing the Peabody Individual Achievement Test

(PIAT) from the list of approved tests. Clearly there is much discussion, study, and dissension in the domain of assessment testing in the area of reading.

Summary

Elementary classroom teachers and other reading specialists who work with children spend a fair amount of time diagnosing the reading abilities of their students. An examination of current research in this area shows that although various components of diagnosing and remediation of reading problems have been studied, very little data exist that assembles a composite of the many approaches, strategies, and instruments reading facilitators commonly use. Benton (1978) concluded, in reference to disabled readers, that effective clinical teaching continues to be a process of manipulating many variables to uncover the unique learning patterns of each child. The dynamic of how reading facilitators identify and manipulate variables in the task of learning to read and how they attempt to reach each unique child is examined in this study.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out how reading abilities are identified in typical third grade classrooms. A second purpose was to ascertain the approaches, strategies, and instruments reading facilitators (classroom teachers and specialists) use to support growth. A comparison was made among school districts.

Questions to be Answered

- What do classroom teachers, reading specialists, and inclusion special education teachers (reading facilitators) typically use for diagnosing reading abilities of third grade children?
- What do these reading facilitators typically use to support growth in the reading abilities of third grade children?
- How do reading facilitators and their school districts compare to each other in their methods for identification and support of growth?

Methodology

Subjects

Twenty-two third grade classroom teachers, twelve remedial reading specialists, five reading supervisors, and seven inclusion special education teachers were surveyed from five school districts in Western New York. Seventeen third grade classroom teachers, four remedial reading specialists, two reading supervisors, and three inclusion special education teachers returned the surveys ($n = 26$). All districts would be termed rural. The elementary schools, (kindergarten through sixth grade), had between 625 to 725 students each. Eighteen third grade classroom teachers, nine remedial reading specialists, three reading supervisors, and four inclusion special education teachers returned the surveys.

Materials/Instruments

A teacher survey (see Appendix) was designed by the researcher. It reflected the multitude of approaches, strategies, and instruments found in the current literature on reading diagnosis. The survey included a two-point scale of use, do not use and a four-point rating scale of often, sometimes, rarely, never. Subjects rated their frequency of use of various diagnostic tools, diagnostic tests, achievement tests, approaches, instructional techniques, and reading strategies. Surveys also included open-ended questions.

Packets were sent to teachers that included an introduction letter that explained the purpose of the study, and return envelope. A reminder postcard was also sent.

Procedures

The researcher met with an appropriate administrator in each district to gain approval for the teacher surveys. Next, a contact person was secured, and the introduction letter, teacher survey, and return envelope packets were given to them for distribution to all classroom teachers, inclusion special education teachers, and remedial reading specialist at the third grade level in their school.

Two weeks later a set of reminder cards were sent to the contact persons for distribution to each of the participants at their school.

Analysis Of Data

The data collected consisted of ratings which were evaluated using frequency distribution histograms. Open-ended question data was examined for commonalties and singularities. The researcher also compared the data across each school district, and between the five school districts.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out how reading abilities are identified in typical third grade classrooms. A second purpose was to ascertain the approaches, strategies, and instruments reading facilitators (classroom teachers and specialists) use to support growth. A third purpose was to compare data among school districts.

Results

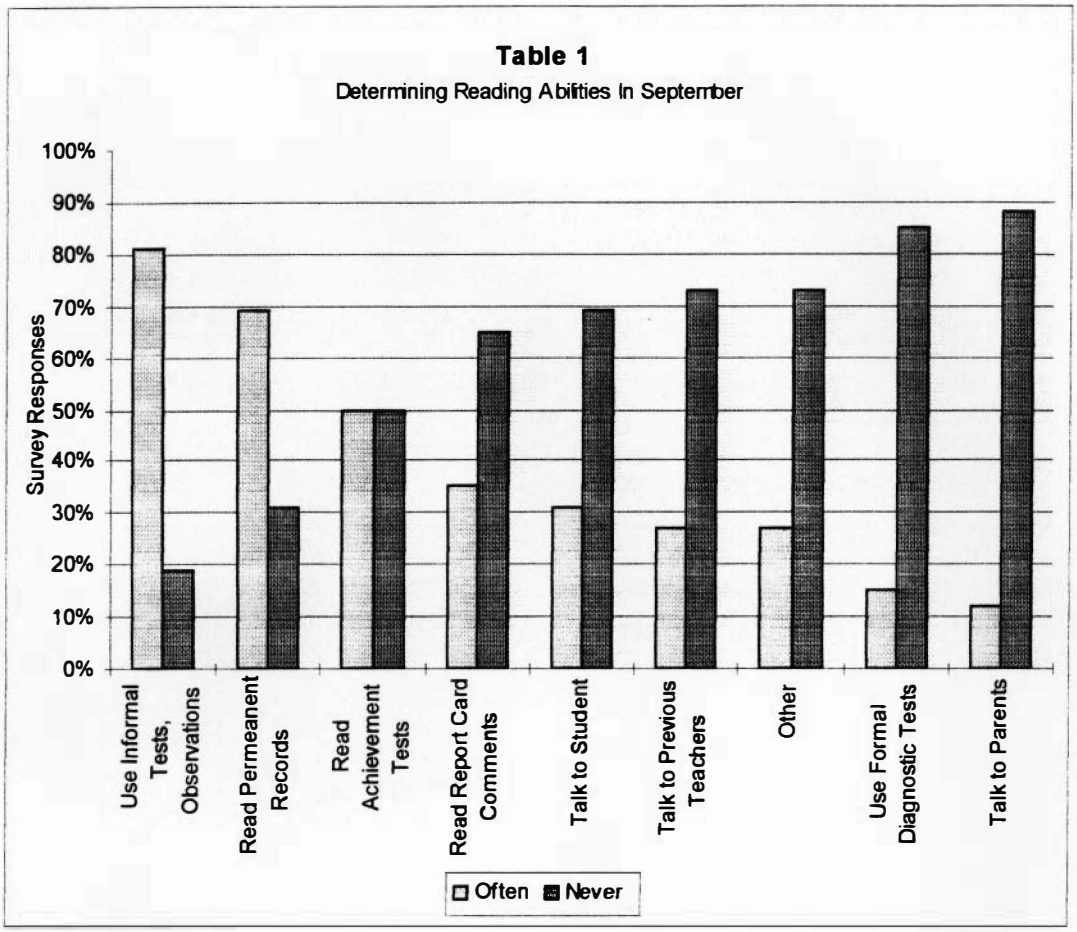
Survey item data were compiled and then converted into percentages of responses to each category of the two rating scales: Use, Do not use and Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never. Frequency histograms were performed and survey items were examined for frequencies of the questions and items probed by the survey. Open-ended questions were considered and discussed. A comparison of responses between school districts was done.

Part 1

This part of the survey gathered answers to the question: What do classroom teachers, reading specialists, and inclusion special education teachers (reading facilitators) typically use for diagnosing reading abilities of third grade children? Answers were grouped into what was done in September to determine reading abilities, and what was done throughout the school year to determine reading abilities. Tools used throughout the year to assess reading abilities were further organized into three categories of published diagnostic tests, standardized reading achievement tests, and miscellaneous diagnostic tools.

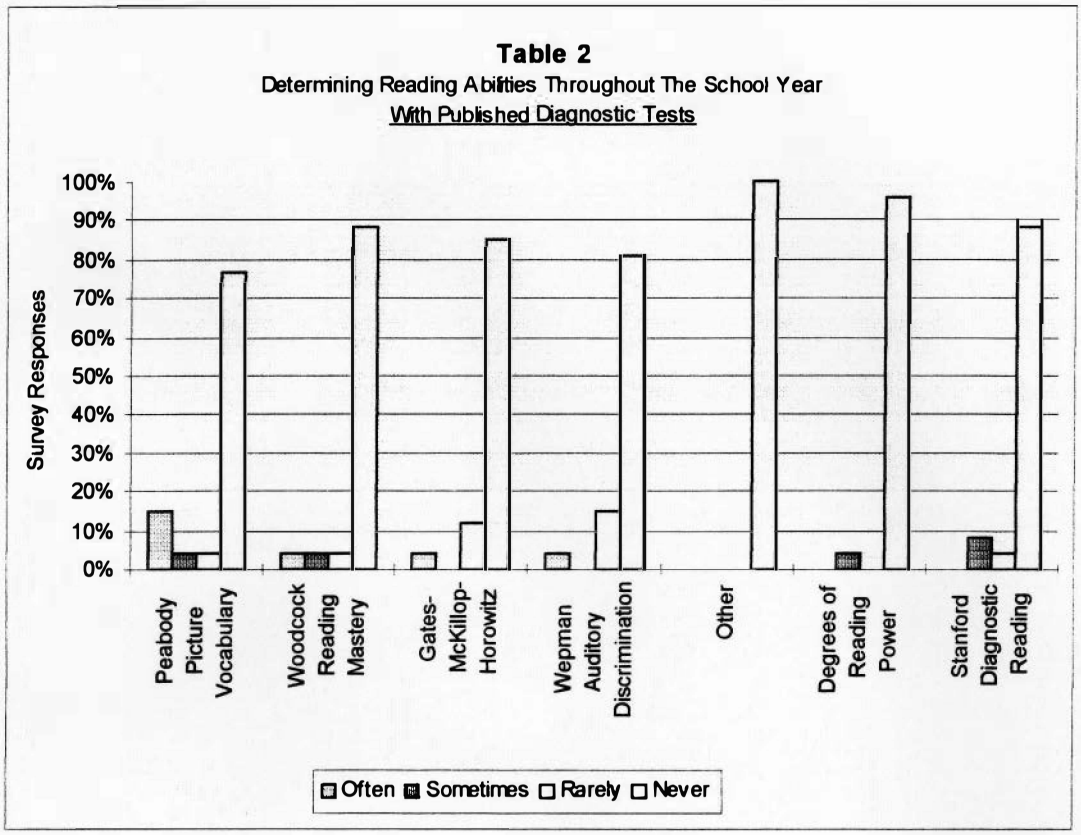
Determining the reading abilities of students in September

Table 1, on the next page, displays the Use, Do not use Scale results for the first nine items in the survey that identify how reading facilitators learn about student reading abilities when they initially meet them in September. Survey respondents indicated that they routinely used informal tests - observations (81%), read permanent records (69%), and read achievement test scores (50%) in September. Conversely, respondents expressed relative little use of formal diagnostic tests (85%), talking to previous teachers (73%), talking to parents (88%), or reading report card comments (65%). Between 12% and 35% also read report card comments, talk to the students themselves, or use other factors to assess reading abilities in September.



Determining the reading abilities of students throughout the school year

The rating scale of Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never Scale was used for this section of the survey, and the three categories of published diagnostic tests, standardized reading achievement tests, and miscellaneous diagnostic tools were examined.



- Published Diagnostic Tests

Table 2 shows that very few tests were used often. Peabody Picture Vocabulary was used most often (15%). Four percent of the respondents said they often used Woodcock Reading Mastery, Gates-McKillop-Horowitz, and Wepman Auditory Discrimination tests. Seventy-seven to ninety-six percent said they never used any of these tests during the school year. No one indicated that they use any test not specified in the survey.

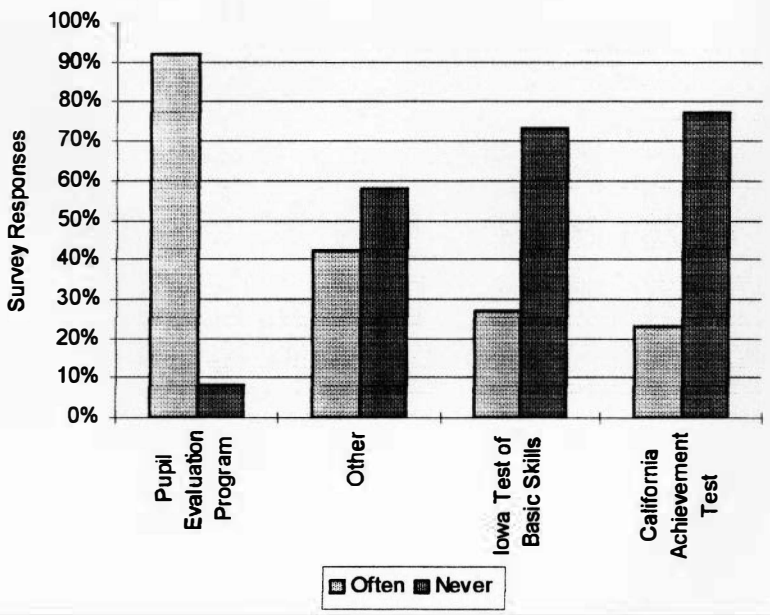
- Standardized Reading Achievement Tests

Table 3 indicates the majority often used the Pupil Evaluation Program test. Both the Iowa test of basic skills (27%) and the California Achievement test (23%) were also indicated as often used. Forty-three percent of the respondents filled in the other category of standardized reading achievement tests often used, and wrote that they used Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills in Reading. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents shared that they participated in the pilot for the New York State Assessments in Language Arts. Data were compressed into Often and Never categories due to no responses in the sometimes and rarely categories.

Table 3

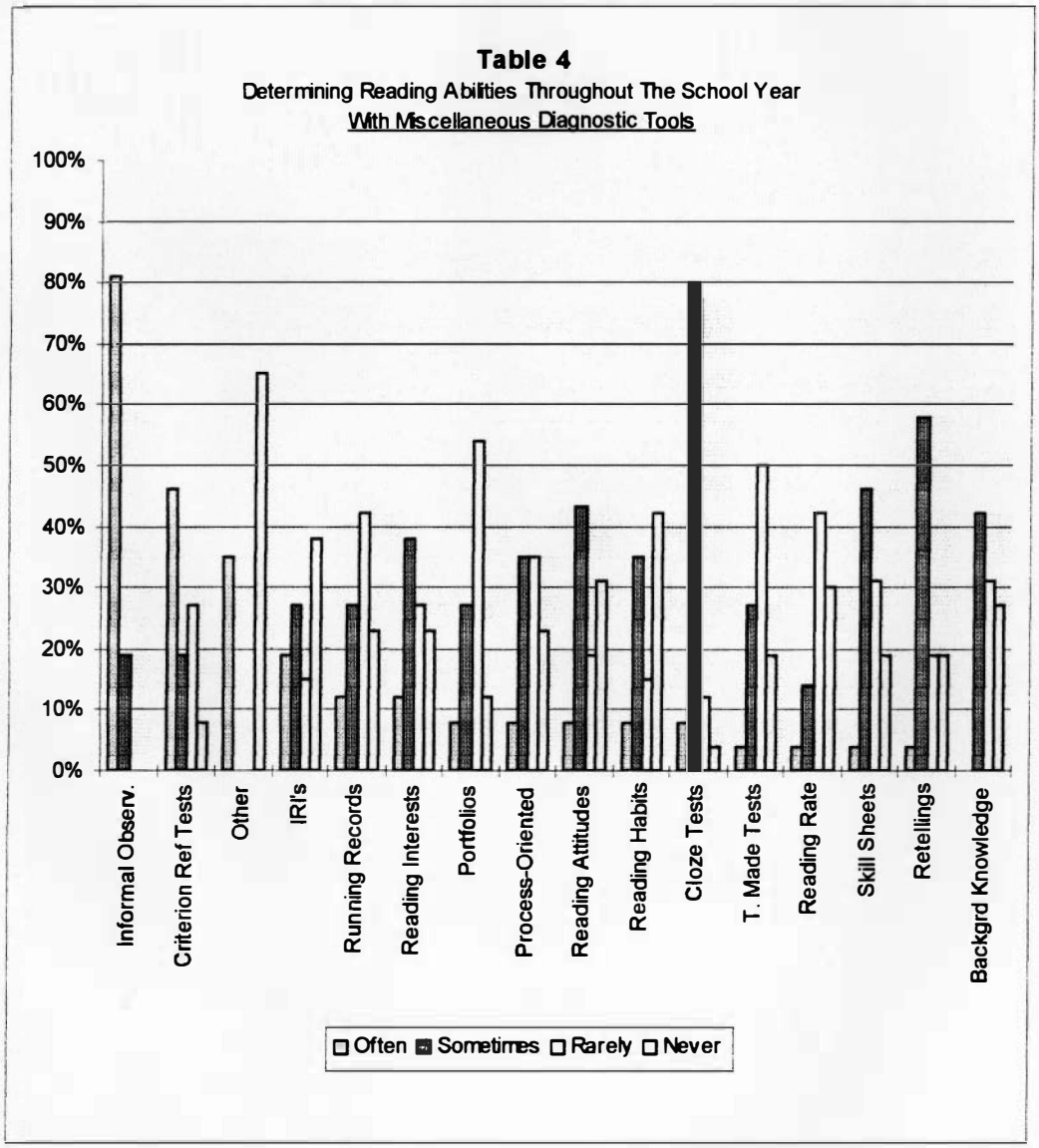
Determining Reading Abilities Throughout The School Year

With Standardized Reading Achievement Tests



- Miscellaneous Diagnostic Tools

Reading facilitators indicated they used a variety of diagnostic tools to measure reading abilities. Table 4 shows that most often cited as used often were daily, informal observation (81%), and criterion referenced tests (46%).



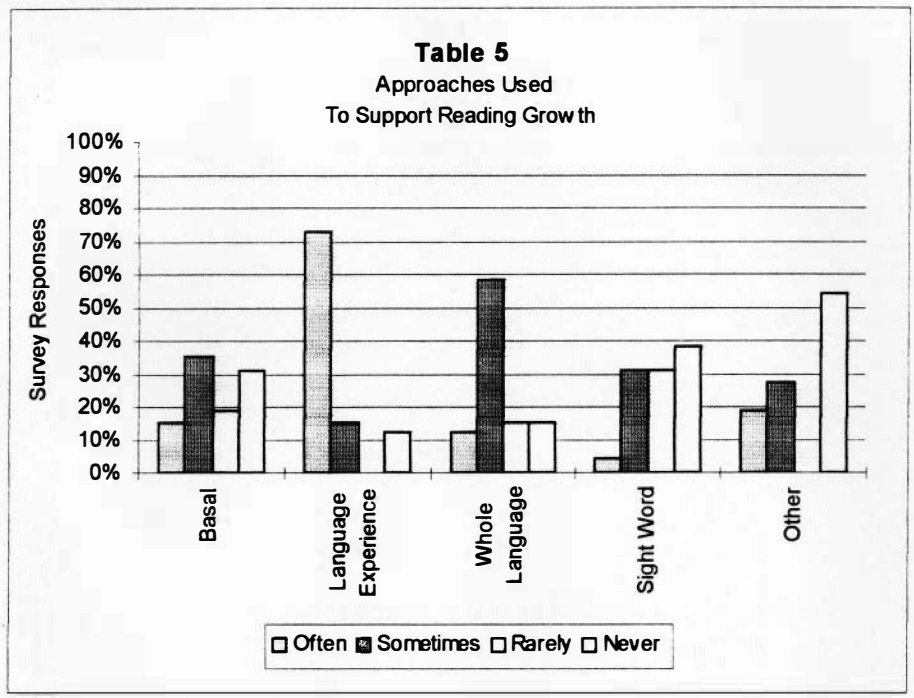
The sometimes response category on Table 4 revealed mixed results. Seventy-seven percent said they sometimes used Cloze tests, and fifty-eight percent said they sometimes used retellings. Measures of reading attitudes, interests, habits, process-oriented assessment, skill sheet use, and tests of background knowledge all fell between the 35% and 46% range of use in the sometimes category. Sixty-five percent responded never to using tools not on the item list. Other items listed as never being used were measures of reading habits (42%), informal reading inventories (38%), measures of reading attitudes (31%), and measures of reading rate (30%). The only item rated with zero percent for both rarely and never was daily, informal observation, and the only item never used often was tests of background knowledge. In the category of other, twenty-six percent of respondents indicated they use Defining Literacy Levels diagnostics which are criterion referenced assessments.

Part 2

This part of the survey gathered answers to the question: What do reading facilitators (classroom teachers, reading specialists, and inclusion special education teachers) typically use to support growth in the reading abilities of third grade children? Answers were grouped into approaches, instructional techniques, reading strategies, and miscellaneous strategies. Respondents were asked to rate each of the items for frequency of use.

Approaches used to support growth

Reading facilitators indicated that they used a language experience approach to support growth most often (73%) in Table 5. A majority (58%) indicated they also sometimes used a whole language approach.



Basal and Sight Word approaches drew mixed results. The only approach mentioned in the other category was Defining Literacy Levels (19% often, and 27% sometimes).

Instructional Techniques used to support growth

Table 6 displays that there is no one clear choice being used. This table shows that Sustained Silent Reading (61%), Reading to Students (58%), Guided Reading (58%), Reading journals/logs (58%), Shared Book Experience (54%),

Paired Reading (43%), and Literature discussion (35%) techniques were cited as most often used throughout the school year by third grade reading facilitators. Table 6 also indicates each of the three items of sustained silent reading, reading to students and guided reading were used by all respondents to some degree.

Table 6

Instructional Techniques Used To Support Grow th

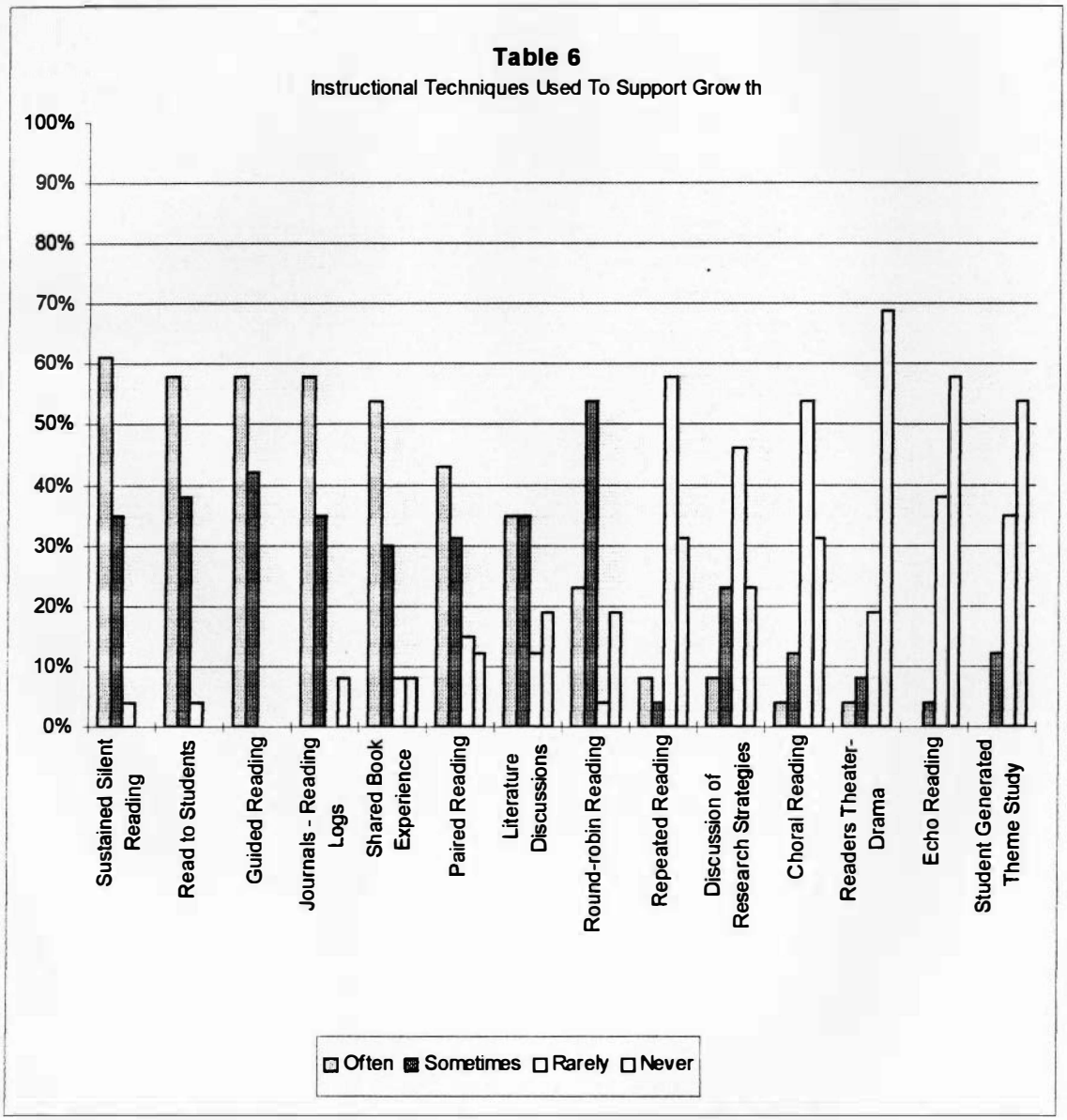


Table 6 further delineates that round-robin reading continues to be used (often 23%, sometimes 54%). Items shown to be used least often (rarely and never) to support growth were repeated readings, discussion of research strategies, choral reading, readers theater/drama, echo reading, and student generated theme study. The last two items mentioned were never chosen in the often category.

Reading Strategies used to support growth

Table 7 displays reading strategies used throughout the school year. Again, item ratings were mixed. The often rating was given to 11 of the 15 items. The items most frequently chosen in the often category on table 7 were prediction (42%), monitoring/confirming/correcting comprehension (35%), and using prior knowledge with context to predict (27%).

The table shows that the sometimes category was chosen repeatedly. More than fifty percent chose sometimes to describe their use of graphic organizers, breaking words into pronounceable syllables, semantic mapping, writing - plan/write/revise, using prior knowledge with context to predict, reading with a purpose, and prediction strategies. The sometimes category was chosen many times for monitoring/confirming/correcting comprehension (38%) and for reviewing and retaining information and concepts (35%),

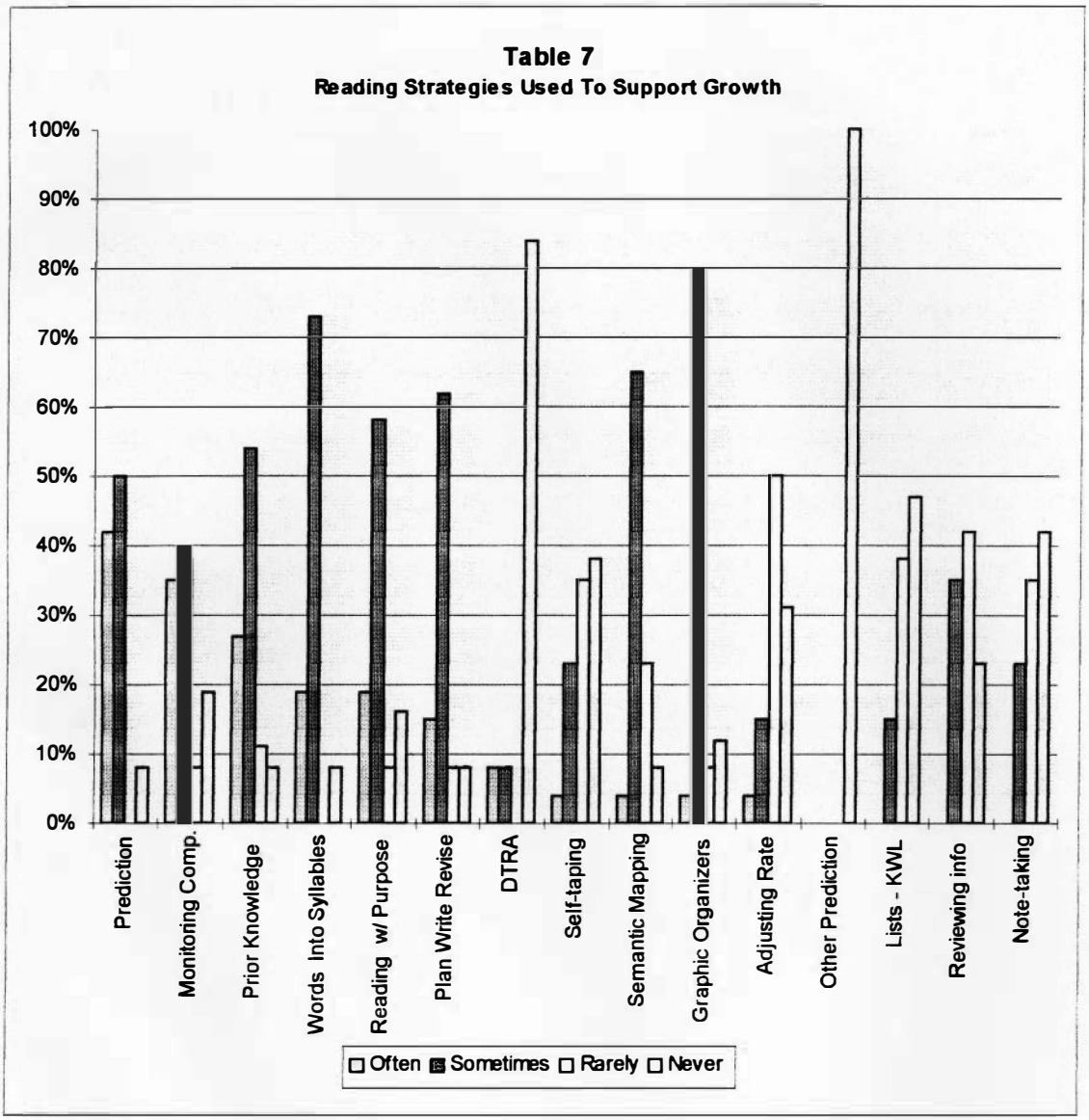
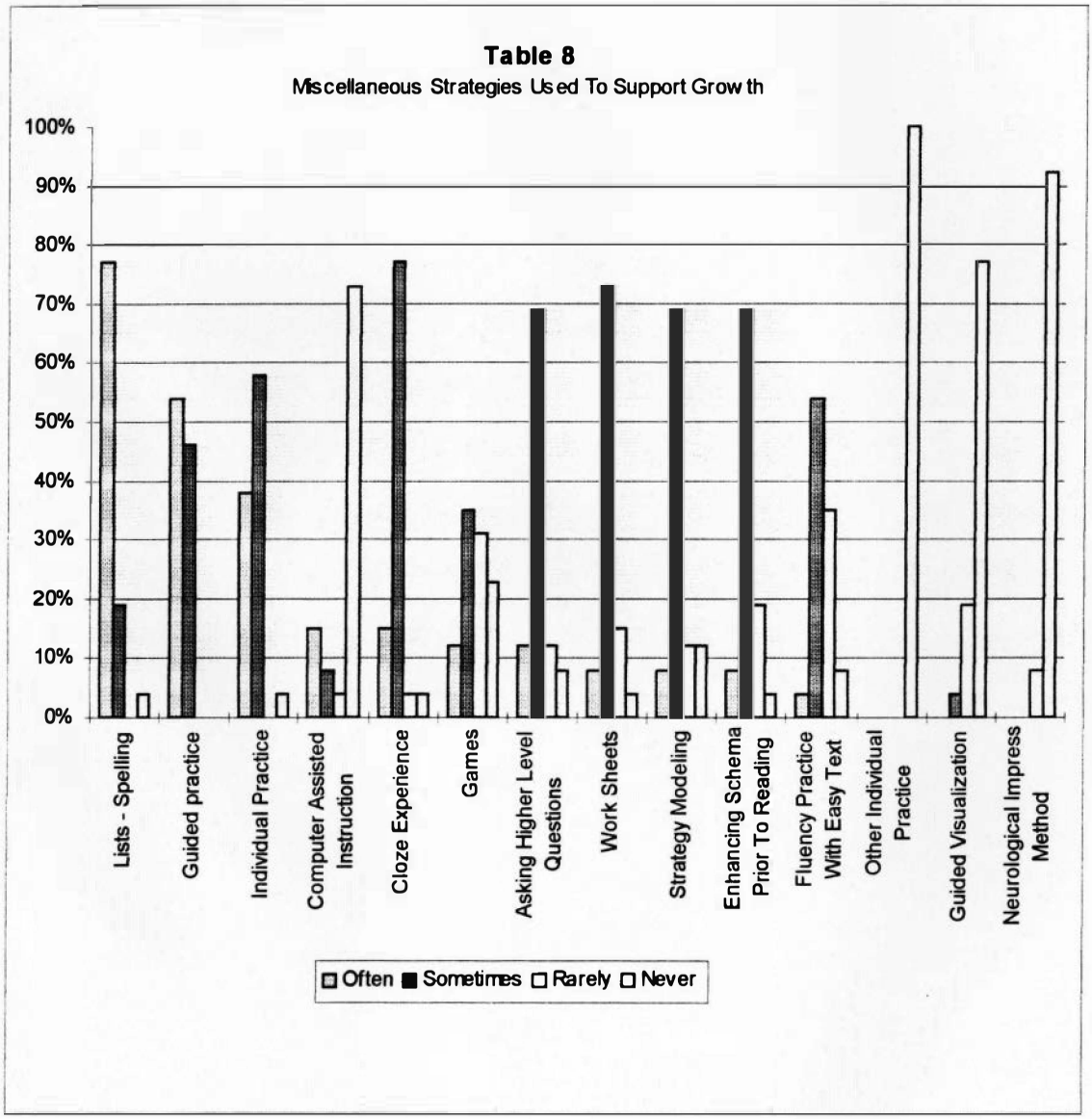


Table 7 clearly shows that directed reading-thing activities were used only by a few. No one chose to add other predictions strategies so that category shows a one hundred percent never use graph.

Miscellaneous Strategies used to support growth

Table 8 shows that spelling lists, guided practice, and independent practice were used often. The table also displays that most of the 14 items were frequently used sometimes by the respondents.



Part 3

The four open-ended questions were examined. Question 1 asked respondents if they diagnose the reading abilities of students who enter their classroom after the beginning of the school year differently than Part 1 of the survey. Fifteen percent responded to this question. All stated they did not diagnose later entries differently. No response (85%) also indicates no differences in diagnosis. All attest that they do not diagnose reading abilities of students who enter their classrooms after the beginning of the school year differently than they indicated in Part 1 of the survey.

Question 2 asked if respondents collaborated with anyone to alleviate an identified difficulty. Thirty-five percent indicated that they do collaborate. Most recorded that they work together with a reading specialist. Two respondents said they might contact their Committee on Special Education for an evaluation. One respondent wrote that she wouldn't collaborate with anyone unless it was a severe problem.

Question 3 asked if student growth checklists are kept. Fifty-four percent said yes, but none were included with the returned surveys. Nineteen percent wrote that they keep track of growth in their gradebooks and twenty-eight percent keep track of growth with teacher evaluations written in student reading journals/logs.

Question 4 requested descriptions of any innovative reading programming or reading assessment being done within surveyed school districts. Only one

program was mentioned. All responses from two districts (47% of the total respondents) indicated that they used *Defining Literacy Levels* (Weaver, 1992). Weaver describes the purposes of her program best. They are:

> To describe goals and a framework for classroom experiences in developing literacy using a whole language approach - to provide guidelines for instruction and assessment in this learning to read/write structure - to assist teachers in understanding reading/writing development in a whole language approach - and to provide a means for selecting books at various literacy levels to assist children on the road to literacy (p. 6)

Part 4

This part of the survey gathered information about the question: How do reading facilitators and their school districts compare to each other in their methods for identification and support of growth?

Initially the researcher examined who responded from the five districts surveyed. School A had 7 respondents (4 classroom teachers, 2 special education teachers, and 1 remedial reading program supervisor). School B had 7 respondent, also (4 classroom teachers, 2 special education teachers, and 1 remedial reading teacher). School C had 5 respondents (3 classroom teachers, 1 remedial reading teacher, and 1 remedial reading supervisor). School D had 4 respondents (3 classroom teachers, and 1 remedial reading teacher). School E had 3 respondents (3 classroom teachers).

Lack of data in special education teacher, remedial reading teacher, and remedial reading supervisor categories for many of the schools lead the researcher to delete these classifications from this comparison question.

Data were examined within each of the five schools surveyed, and then data were compared to each of the other districts. No clear pattern of difference were noted by the researcher either from each other or from the tables in Part 1 and Part 2 of this analysis except for minor deviations noted below. There were 85 items on the entire survey. There were some similarities. Classroom teachers within schools sometimes agreed with each other. School A classroom teachers agreed on 20 items, School B agreed on 18 items, School C agreed on 28 items, School D agreed on 41 items, and School E agreed on 31 items. The items agreed upon by the schools also coincided on never and rarely categories. Further, School C, School D, and School E provided similar data in the often category.

Discussion

Survey data display a wide variety of elements that third grade classroom teachers, reading specialist, and inclusion special education teachers use to diagnose reading abilities and support growth in reading throughout the school year.

Part 1

Data from part 1 suggest reading facilitators use many ingredients when they look to find out about the reading abilities of their students. Respondents used an average of three items in September for assessment. While few used published diagnostic tests, virtually all used end-of-the-year type standardized reading achievement testing. Frequency of use in the miscellaneous diagnostic tools list is impressive. Although most tools were occasionally never used, respondents used an average of four items often, five items sometimes, and four items rarely.

Part 2

Reading facilitators make use of diverse approaches, strategies, and techniques when supporting the reading growth of their students throughout the school year. Only three respondents indicated they use one approach to facilitate reading growth. Eight-eight percent of the respondents used two to five approaches. The most common choice for often was language experience approach. In the instructional techniques used to support growth portion of the

survey there was no clear choice of any one item. Reading facilitators choose a variety of techniques, and rated them differently. Many chose sustained silent reading, reading to students, guided reading, journals, shared book experience, literature discussions and round-robin reading. Item ratings were mixed for the reading strategies category, also. Reading facilitators might choose to use prediction, accessing prior knowledge, monitoring of comprehension, or semantic mapping and graphic organizing. The miscellaneous strategies portion of the survey revealed that higher percentages of reading facilitators responded to one or another category of the rating scale. For example, 77% responded that they often used prediction, and 72% responded that they sometimes used prior knowledge.

Part 3

The open-ended question portion of the survey drew scant information. Classroom teachers, reading specialists, and inclusion special education teachers all expressed that they do not assess children entering their classes after the beginning of the school year differently than original students. One third do collaborate with reading specialists when reading difficulties are apparent, and a few shared that they might contact their Committee on Special Education for an evaluation. More than half shared that they keep checklists of student growth. About a quarter expressed that they keep track of growth in reading in gradebooks and teacher evaluations written in student journals/logs. All of the respondents from two school districts shared information about an innovative program being

used at their school. Defining Literacy Levels (Weaver, 1992) is described as a framework for a whole language approach to learning literacy.

Part 4

Due to the small number of respondents in any category other than classroom teacher, comparison between school districts would have been difficult. The researcher decided to compare only classroom teacher responses. Classroom teachers from all five schools surveyed reflected both the diversity in use of specific items for determining reading abilities and supporting growth and the diversity in the frequency of use of any of the survey items. Although no clear pattern of difference between school districts emerged from the data, there were similarities among the ratings within schools, and between schools.

Summary

Third grade classroom teachers, reading specialists, and inclusion special education teachers use a wide variety of information to determine the reading abilities of their students. Most commonly they use informal tests and observations when first evaluating student ability. Later they gather information by using informal observations, criterion referenced tests, running records, cloze, and retellings among other diagnostic tools.

These reading facilitators also use a divergent group of approaches, techniques and strategies to support the reading growth of their students

throughout the school year. The language experience approach was cited most often, but others including basal, whole language, sight word, and defining literacy levels were referred to often, also. Instructional techniques used varied by respondent. Many indicated use of sustained silent reading, reading to students, guided reading and use of journals. Predicting, monitoring comprehension, accessing prior knowledge, spelling lists, guided and individual practice, and asking of higher level questions number among strategies that reading facilitators use regularly.

When students enter a school during the academic has no bearing on how they are evaluated for reading abilities. Many reading facilitators collaborate if they identify reading difficulty. Most facilitators keep track of student growth in gradebooks or student's reading journals/logs. The one new reading program survey respondents shared was the whole language based Defining Literacy Levels (Weaver, 1992).

Classroom teachers in the five districts surveyed were compared. No clear pattern of differences were shown. All districts showed a similar variety of response rates. Similarities were noted within school districts. Classroom teachers in two schools agreed on nearly one quarter of the surveyed items. Classroom teachers in two other schools agreed on one third of the surveyed items. Classroom teachers in the final school agreed on almost one half of the items surveyed.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out how reading abilities are identified in typical third grade classrooms. A second purpose was to ascertain the approaches, strategies, and instruments reading facilitators (classroom teachers and specialists) use to support growth. A comparison was made among school districts.

Conclusions

The present study found that third grade classroom teachers, reading specialists, and inclusion special education teachers use a wide variety of information to learn about the reading abilities of their students. They frequently use informal tests and observations. Throughout the school year they sometimes gather information by using retellings, informal observations, criterion referenced tests, running records, and cloze among other diagnostic tools.

These reading facilitators also use a numerous approaches, techniques and strategies to support the reading growth of their students throughout the school year. Most often chosen was the language experience approach, but others including basal, whole language, sight word, and defining literacy levels were also referred to often. Although instructional techniques used varied by respondent many indicated they used sustained silent reading, reading to students, guided reading and journals to encourage growth in reading. Predicting, monitoring comprehension, accessing prior knowledge, spelling lists, guided and individual practice, and asking of higher level questions number among strategies that reading facilitators use regularly.

The survey responses implied that all students are evaluated for reading abilities the same way no matter what time of the year they enter a classroom. Responses also showed that many reading facilitators collaborate if they identify reading difficulty. Student growth is recorded in gradebooks or student's reading journals/logs. There is a new whole language based reading program being used by two school districts surveyed called Defining Literacy Levels (Weaver, 1992).

No clear pattern of differences were shown when school districts were compared. All districts showed a similar variety of response rates. Similarities were noted within school districts. Classroom teachers in two schools agreed on nearly one quarter of the surveyed items. Classroom teachers in two other schools agreed on one third of the surveyed items. Classroom teachers in the final school agreed on almost one half of the items surveyed.

Discussion

It appears that Benton's (1978) view that teaching is a process of manipulating multiple variables to discover the unique learning patterns of each disabled reader continues to be true. As reading facilitators sought to identify reading abilities and support growth in reading they indicated that they used an assorted collection of tools. No two respondents completed the eighty-five item survey in the same fashion.

Data showed the Pupil Evaluation Program Test being used by only ninety-three percent of the respondents. This is a mandatory New York State test, and at first glance this information was confusing. Further examination of the data showed that some remedial reading teachers did not give this test. Presumably it was given to students by their classroom teachers.

Implications for Further Research

Some limitations of this study were mentioned in Chapter 1. First was the relatively small number of different school districts (n =5), and participants (n=26) who may not have been representative of the generalized population of school districts or third grade teachers. It was found that the comparison portion of this study was inconclusive due to the small number of respondents. The second limitation was the length of the survey may have precluded answers to the

open-ended questions. If this occurred then the information gathered may not have been complete and accurate. A third limitation of the study was the time frame of the distribution of the survey may have affected the number of surveys returned. All of these limitations could be adjusted for in further research.

Further research might alleviate an additionally noted limitation of this study. The rating scale was difficult to use as data were compiled by the researcher. Perhaps a Yes (with frequency)/No scale, or a combined Often/Sometimes-Rarely/Never scale would be more serviceable.

There were a number of things the researcher thought might benefit from further probes. Sixty-six to eighty-eight percent of the respondents shared that they never read report card comments, talked to parents or the students themselves, or used formal diagnostic tests to help determine reading abilities in September. It would seem that doing/using these things would be somewhat beneficial when diagnosing reading abilities. Another peculiarity the researcher found was little use during the school year of published diagnostic tests. Some time is required to perform many of these tests, and time is valuable in a school day, but it would seem a better use of a teacher's time to identify problem areas so they could work to correct them. Some training is required to perform many of the tests. Maybe this is lacking, or perhaps these test are not seen as valid or practical.

Another area of interest is running records. These may soon be required by New York State to evaluate students' reading miscues. More than seventy percent

indicated they use them only rarely or never. Is this because they don't know how, because they do not see value in them, or for some other reason?

Reported multiple uses of approaches to reading is a curious phenomenon to the researcher. Personal definitions of some of the various approaches would make them mutually exclusive, yet data for the for approaches shows they are not used exclusively. Are the researchers personal definitions faulty, or is something else happening?

Many instructional techniques (like choral and echo reading) are being used rarely or never that have been shown to be beneficial to reading growth. Why is this happening? Note-taking strategies are rarely or never used. Is this because it is impractical at the third grade level? Computer Assisted Instruction is another strategy that is being used rarely. As computers linked to databases become more common will this change?

In general classroom teachers, remedial reading specialists, and special education teachers pull diagnosis and treatment tools from a wide mixture of items. Identifying why they use the tools they use would be an avenue to explore further.

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Appendix

Researcher-made Survey

E. As you support the reading growth of your students throughout the school year, what approaches, techniques, and strategies do you use?

(Please **RATE** these **O** - often, **S** - sometimes, **R**- rarely, or **N** - never use.) ** There may be items that you are unfamiliar with - if so, please leave them blank. **

Approaches

___ Basal Reading Approach
___ Language Experience Approach
___ Whole Language Approach
___ Sight Word (look-say) Approach
___ Other approach: _____

Instructional Techniques

___ Read to students
___ Paired reading
___ Guided reading
___ Repeated reading
___ Round-robin reading
___ Choral reading
___ Echo reading
___ Sustained silent reading
___ Literature discussions
___ Readers theater/drama
___ Student generated theme study
___ Journals/reading logs
___ Shared book experience
___ Discussion of reading, research strategies & skills

Reading Strategies

___ Prediction
___ DRTA (Directed reading-thinking activity)
___ Using prior knowledge with context to predict
___ Other prediction strategy: _____
___ Breaking words into pronounceable syllables
___ Monitoring/confirming/correcting comprehension
___ Students listen to themselves on tape confirming/correcting
___ Through writing - plan/write/revise
___ Reading with a purpose
___ KWL (Lists of what you Know, Want to know, Learned)
___ Reviewing and retaining information and concepts
___ Note-taking with intent
___ Semantic mapping/webbing
___ Graphic organizers
___ Adjusting rate and approach depending on reading purpose

Miscellaneous Strategies

___ Computer Assisted Instruction(CAI)
___ Guided practice
___ Individual practice
___ Work sheets
___ Games
___ Lists (e.g. spelling)
___ Other individual practice: _____
___Cloze experience
___Modeling of specific strategies
___Enhancingof schema prior to reading
___Guided visualization
___Fluency practice with easy text
___Asking of higher level questions
___Neurological Impress method

F. Do you use any kind of checklist to keep track of student growth? No/Yes--

If yes, please describe or attach samples: _____

G. If you are using innovative approaches for reading programming or assessment of reading abilities please specify/describe them here. _____

*** Copies of any materials which might clarify any aspect of this survey would be appreciated ***

Thank you for your help!

Sincerely, Mrs. Becky Gnage

Thank you for participating in my survey. It should take four to seven minutes to complete.

I am a(n) __ classroom teacher __ special education teacher __ remedial reading teacher __ other: _____. School Code _____

A. What do you routinely do in September to determine the reading abilities of your students? (Please check all that apply.)

___ I read permanent records ___ I talk with previous teachers __ I talk with the students ___ I use informal tests (IRI's, observations, etc.) ___ I read achievement test scores

___ I read report card comments ___ I use formal diagnostic tests ___ I talk with the parents ___ Other: _____

B. Do you use any of the following throughout the year to help you determine reading abilities?

(Please **RATE** these **O** - often, **S** - sometimes, **R**- rarely, or **N** - never use.) ** There may be items that you are unfamilar with - if so, please leave them blank. **

Miscellaneous diagnostic tools

___ IRI's (Informal Reading Inventories)
___ Measures of reading habits
___ Measures of reading attitudes
___ Measures of reading interests
___ Measures of reading rate
___ Tests of background knowledge
___ Running records (miscue analysis)
___ Retellings
___ Daily, informal observation
___ Criterion referenced tests
___ Teacher made diagnostic tests
___ Process-oriented assessment
___ Portfolios
___ Cloze tests/passages
___ Skill sheets
___ Other: _____

Published diagnostic tests:

___ DRP (Degrees of Reading Power)
___ Gates-McKillop-Horowitz
___ Peabody Picture Vocabulary
___ Stanford Diagnostic Reading
___ Wepman Auditory Discrimination
___ Woodcock Reading Mastery
___ Other: _____

Standardized reading achievement tests:

___ CAT (California Achievement test)
___ Iowa test of basic skills
___ PEP
___ Other: _____

C. If you diagnose the reading abilities of students who enter your classroom after the beginning of the school year differently than above, please explain: _____

_____

_____

D. Once you identify possible reading difficulties do you collaborate with anyone to alleviate the difficulty? No/Yes - If yes, who? _____

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